

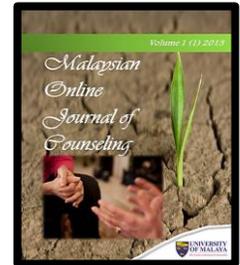
THE SELF IN THE COUNSELING PROCESS: A CASE STUDY

Wong Ching Ching

ABSTRACT

This research study explored the development of the spiritual experiences of the self in the counseling process. The study utilized the qualitative case study on a client who was concerned with in depth soul searching. The tools and techniques which were used to facilitate the counseling process were The Satir Model, The Hypnotherapy, The Existential Therapy and The Jungian Expressive Arts Therapy. The counseling process was embracing the client's spirituality and life value which have provided solutions for the client's struggles. The client's self was nurtured and she has found the direction in life which could fulfil her soul.

Keywords: The Spiritual experiences, The Self, The Counseling process.



[1]
Faculty of Education
University of Malaya,
Kuala Lumpur

Corresponding Author:
University of Malaya,
Kuala Lumpur
sfabeth@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The process of counseling and psychotherapy is an interaction between the counselor and the client. The connectedness between the two persons helps the inward self to expand and to develop towards the goal of achieving “who one really is” (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). The capacity of the “I” becoming stronger is a journey of integration and transformation. It is a process of owning oneself (Powell, 1995).

There are several connotations on the phrase of “the self” in the field of counseling and psychology. In the existential perspective of psychotherapy, the self is the center-point of a person’s entire network of physical, social, personal and spiritual world relations (Van Deurzen, 2002, p. 166). From the perspective of Jungian psychology, the self is the essence of what we are. The self is the complete expression of individuation where it shows the goal of our life (Jung, 1959). According to Virginia Satir (1963—1983), she has explicated the self as the true “I am”. It is where the true essence of one’s existence dwells (Pidcocke, 2010; Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 2006). As in logotherapy, the self is revealed when one has found one’s own vocation in life, in which it provides one with an optimistic sense of ownership to one’s being (Kang, Im, Kim, Song, & Sim 2009). Whereas Rogers (1959), defines the self as the “I” or “me” which composed by the perceptions of the characteristics that the “I” or “me” is connected to others and various aspects of life that is attached with values to these perceptions.

Furthermore, Carl Rogers described the “self” in the counseling interpersonal relationship will develop for consistency. There is a drive in every human person towards self actualization when the environmental forces nourished it (Purkey & Stanley, 1996). Both Rogers and Maslow believe that the counseling relationship between counselor and client is the bond that nurtures and heals a hurting client. The most effective component that brings healing during the counseling process is the spiritual connection between the self of the counselor and the self of the client (Carney, 2007). When healing took place, it could bring hope and empower the client to move towards the self transcendent growth process.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary research question that guiding this study was:
“What is the relationship between the spiritual experiences and the self of the client in the counseling process?”

The conceptualization of spiritual experiences that involved the self of the client allowed both theistic and non-theistic perspectives to play their role. Spirituality is an operating and evolving process within the self. The self is a personal but integral component of a human person, and it involved the process of meaning making of the client’s existence and life purpose.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher was employing a qualitative methodology of case study to describe the phenomenon of the “self” in the natural setting in counseling. Slife, Hope and Nebeker (1999) illuminate that the conceptualizations of spirituality mainly, and the “self” specifically in this study are contextual, holistic and transcendent in nature; it qualitative designs provide a platform for the researcher to better understand client’s inner world, or “lived experiences”, thereby helping the researcher to gain a richer in-depth insight into the clients’ spiritual perceptions, beliefs, values, desires, emotions and practices (Slife et al., 1999 as cited in Richards & Bergin, 2007, p. 108). Besides, the qualitative research design placed emphasis on the process of the research, flowing from philosophical assumptions, to worldviews and through a theoretical perspective, until the procedures that involve social and human problems; a true and clear understanding of the spiritual experiences on the “self” could be derived from this approach (Creswell, 2007; McLeod, 2001).

Data were collected through counseling sessions with the client. Each session was being audio-taped and transcribed. The duration for collecting the data was approximately ten months. The researcher was playing the role as the counselor in all the counseling sessions. The techniques and tools which were used in the counseling process were the Satir model, the Existential therapy, the Hypnotherapy and the Jungian Expressive Arts therapy. The ultimate aim for the counseling process was to help the client to touch the “self” and to establish a new way of being. After collecting the data, the counselor reviewed the transcripts several times, significant statements were being identified and categorized into themes. The client was asked to verify the themes and the themes were later being constructed into the essence of data.

THE RESULTS OF THE CASE STUDY

The Client’s Background

Client was a 39-year-old Chinese single lady. With her certificate of professional accounting, she is working as an accounting analyst in one of the accounting firms in Kuala Lumpur. She is the eldest amongst three siblings. Her father was a government servant, a marine officer, now a retiree and her mother was a housewife. Although client did not have a good relationship with her parents but she was very much loved by her grandmother because she was the eldest grandchild in the family.

Client came for counseling mainly to ease her fear. She would like to be happier with who she is. She was hoping that the counselor will do something appropriate to enhance her “self” and to help her develop a better personality so that she could stand up and be confident of herself in pursuing her life goals.

Description of the First Session

Client was aware of the fear within her. She has realized this was the feeling that was holding her from moving forward in life. She would like to work on her fear in session one.

The counselor then applied parts dissociation therapy to ease her fear as well as to generate the resource that could tie down her fear. During the therapy, Client communicated with the problem part and the resource part. Client described the process of therapy as being similar to a SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. She realized the problem part (fear) and the resource part (love) can come together to form a greater life force. They can be matched and merged together.

C'lee: What gives me problem is always the fear in my heart. I always have the second thought that what if nobody is there for me. So, these things come together. With fear, I can do nothing. With fear and love, I think I can do better things.

C'lor: The fear is contra, but the fear and love merge together, it becomes the strength within you.

C'lee: Ya, fear is subset of the love, so it should go forward.

C'lor: What is the different before and after?

C'lee: More energy.

C'lor: Are you going to stand firm for your decision?

C'lee: I want to do it, I don't know how firm I am. I have not tested it out. So I don't know.

C'lor: Let's say the scale is 100 percent. How would you rate yourself for that wantness to do it?

C'lee: 80 percent.

Client was starting to have the zeal to make changes for her self-betterment. She may need time to design a plan that may work out for her. Meanwhile, she has started figuring out what needs to be changed according to her priority. She probably needs more time to put things together and put things into action.

Description of the Second Session

Client has placed therapeutic priority on her self-knowledge. She would like to know herself more. She has shown some improvement in her courage to voice out for herself. Though she has shown some assertiveness, she felt that she has the potential for improvement. She was still the quiet one among her friends. Client revealed that the fear within was probably related to her self-esteem.

C'lee: I guess it is related to my self-esteem. I always thought that people might not listen to me.

What I have said, people might not receive me or perceive me well.

C'lor: That is the fear you have?

C'lee: Yes.

As the client agreed to work on her fear, the control room of the mind, a hypnotherapy technique was utilized to help the client to take control over her fear. According to client, it took her a while to find the switch for her fear.

C'lor: Have you done the adjustment?

C'lee: Actually not much. I saw it as a process of different stage. It is like on-going. When it is time

to decide to do it, I should do it. I believe that it is good to let go some of the fear.

C'lor: Did you do that during trance?

C'lee: I did not remove it, I am just playing around with it.

C'lor: How is the feeling of just play around with the switch?

C'lee: I have a control. I should let go. The top part is like the gearbox in a car, it is 5-4-3-2-1, so I just pull down until 1.

C'lor: How do you feel about that pulling?

C'lee: Good. I have to let go, that's what I want.

C'lor: Do you think you are able to let go?

C'lee: I think I have the confidence.

C'lor: How do you feel now?

C'lee: Very relax. I felt the kind like certainty. That's what I want. I want to let go. I am still in my mind to plan how I want it to be done!

Client has shown her confidence to take control over her problem, the fear of being rejected. Although she still allowed the fear to stay where it should be, she thought she was able to take charge and cope with it.

Description of the Third Session

Client revealed that she has been working consistently on her inner self for the past ten years. Nevertheless, there were certain parts she still kept in their own presence. She was wondering why she kept them and not transformed them. It was the negative thoughts that enhanced the fear of rejection. She was hesitating whether to change her job and whether she should open herself to an intimate relationship. She has the feeling of fear on both events.

The counselor then decided to use The Healing Garden Script technique to help client tailor her negative thoughts. After the induction and deepener for trance, the counselor suggested that she walks through the garden. Client revealed that it looked like a Japanese Garden. The counselor subsequently strengthened client with suggestions of encouragement, courage and change.

Upon waking up, client revealed that she needed more time to plant the flowers. She wanted more space for the flowers.

C'lee: Yes, I think I want something more, some more flowers.

C'lor: Are you longing for something?

C'lee: I think I am.

C'lor: What is that something?

C'lee: A change. I don't know whether it is work or relationship. It's a change. I don't know exactly what? A change of job, may be a new profession, or at the same time I can do what I am happy with, may be a relationship.

Client was aware she was still standing within her comfort zone. Although she desires a change in her job and her relationship with friends, she has yet to step out of her comfort zone. She was actually still feeling the fear of rejection. She was struggling whether she should take the risk.

C'lee: Actually I felt excited what was inside. I don't know why I keep thinking of the beach, looking at the sunrise. Am I going to observe or am I going to make things happened! A bit of anxious, a bit of interest.

C'lor: That's your vision?

C'lee: Ya.

Client needed more time and space to explore the opportunity that was secured so that she could get ready to make a change.

Description of the Fourth Session

There was a shift in client's perception. It was obvious during this session that she has found her direction in life, so to speak. Though she is probably not clear what to do yet, she has decided to courageously step out of her comfort zone.

The sand tray technique was used as a tool to enhance the counseling process. Client revealed she was heading to the place where she would like to be herself (refer to Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2).

C'lee: The place is where my heart is. To be happy is to be myself. To be grounded is to do something that I like. I am not sure.

C'lor: You have not found the answer?

C'lee: To be specific, I wouldn't know. To be grounded, for me I always thought that I am a simple person. May be there are things that I am good at. I like to be my own self.

Client has chosen the tree to signify herself, as she wants to be grounded.

C'lee: When I choose the trees, is always coming back to be deeply rooted in life. Deeply rooted means what I believe is what I am doing. What I am doing is what I believe. That's why the root is going deep down underneath and the trees are going up. It might bear fruits and flowers. And I feel good about it.

C'lor: Is that any connection to your life currently?

C'lee: I saw new branches coming out. The tree trunk is getting bigger. I saw flowers but no fruits yet.

C'lor: What do the flowers meant to you?

C'lee: Something I believe, it gives insight and I become a better person.

Client felt that she was more stable now, not easily shaken up compared with who she was.

C'lee: I am growing a bit older and wiser compare to the last round. I am moving forward from a hillside down to a flat land. I am quite happy actually I am no longer sitting under the tree which I did some years ago. I am moving downwards, I am moving forward. I am happy. A bit of resistance, a bit worry whether it will be successful. I don't think that will stop me and I want to move forward. There are friends who are supporting me.

C'lor: If you want to move the figurine of yourself, where would you like to move?

C'lee: Moving forward to the dream (client moved the figurine toward the house). It is still be myself, where my heart is. The house is the place where my soul can rest.

C'lor: What is the bird on the top of the roof?

C'lee: The bird can see things from far because of its nature. When something stands in a higher place, it can see things from far, can see things that we could not see. As a kind of proactive, for me is a kind of wisdom. Bird can be signifies as someone that can be trusted, someone whom we can rely. As I am processing, the divine came into my mind. I always feel peaceful when birds are around chirping, this is a kind of calmness, comfortable and happy.

The theme of "Welcome Home" was given to the sand tray she designed. This was the turning point that she was seeking for her soul to become a better her.



Figure4.1.Client's sand tray: Moving from a hillside to a flat land.



Figure 4.2. Client's sand tray: Welcome home.

Description of the Fifth Session

The life size portrait of the client revealed her desire to change her job. She was looking for a job that could give her life, a job that dealt with people. By listening to her heart, she managed to determine what her heart wanted. It was also building her faith on her spiritual self, to nurture her soul.

When client was looking at her portrait, she realized the color in the portrait was telling her it was time to make changes (refer to Figure 4.3).

C'lee: I did not think of anything when I drew. Perhaps the change will come from the head. There isn't only integration yet. The small sun I drew is very colorful, perhaps it is my body telling me it is time to change.

C'lor: What about now?

C'lee: I feel that I am ready to try. I am 60 percent ready.

According to client, she was tired of her account analyst job; it was not lively. She intended to quit her current job, find another accounting job in which the pay was good enough for her to further her counseling course.

She drew many curving circles in the life size portrait; she signified the small circle as her energy and the big circle as her life force.

C'lee: Originally they should be one. This is my concept. They are very near to each other, not yet integrate. They are still separated because I think I still have the fear within my heart. Fear of failure.

C'lor: When you talk about it, how do you feel now?

C'lee: It is inside one of my room. Secured. It is not big enough to haunt me down.

C'lor: How much you rate for the difficulty to integrate your energy?

C'lee: Four to five out of ten.

Parts therapy was utilized with the aim to integrate the client's energy and to ease her fear with the integrated energy. During the therapeutic process, client felt tranquil when the integrated energy was surrounding her fear of failure.

C'lor: How do you feel throughout the process?

C'lee: Very relaxing. The energy and the life force said now, ok you are connected. So you are becoming one. My heart feels it is beginning to connect. Relax.

C'lor: Is that any image that is emerging?

C'lee: Ya, an image of a type of plant that is waiting for the flower to blossom, it seems wanting to burst. I feel it is telling me "Be prepared for the burst, taking up the risk.

C'lor: What do you think the message conveys?

C'lee: I feel a little fear. But on the other hand I am also excited. What's coming? What's next? What's new? All the while you have been talking what gives you life, take up the challenge, take up the risk, just go for it!

This was a strong message for her to take a step forward to make changes in her life. The message actually gave client the strength and courage to take up the challenge. Although she did not know whether the plan of changing would work for her, she has deliberately decided to go for the betterment of her soul!

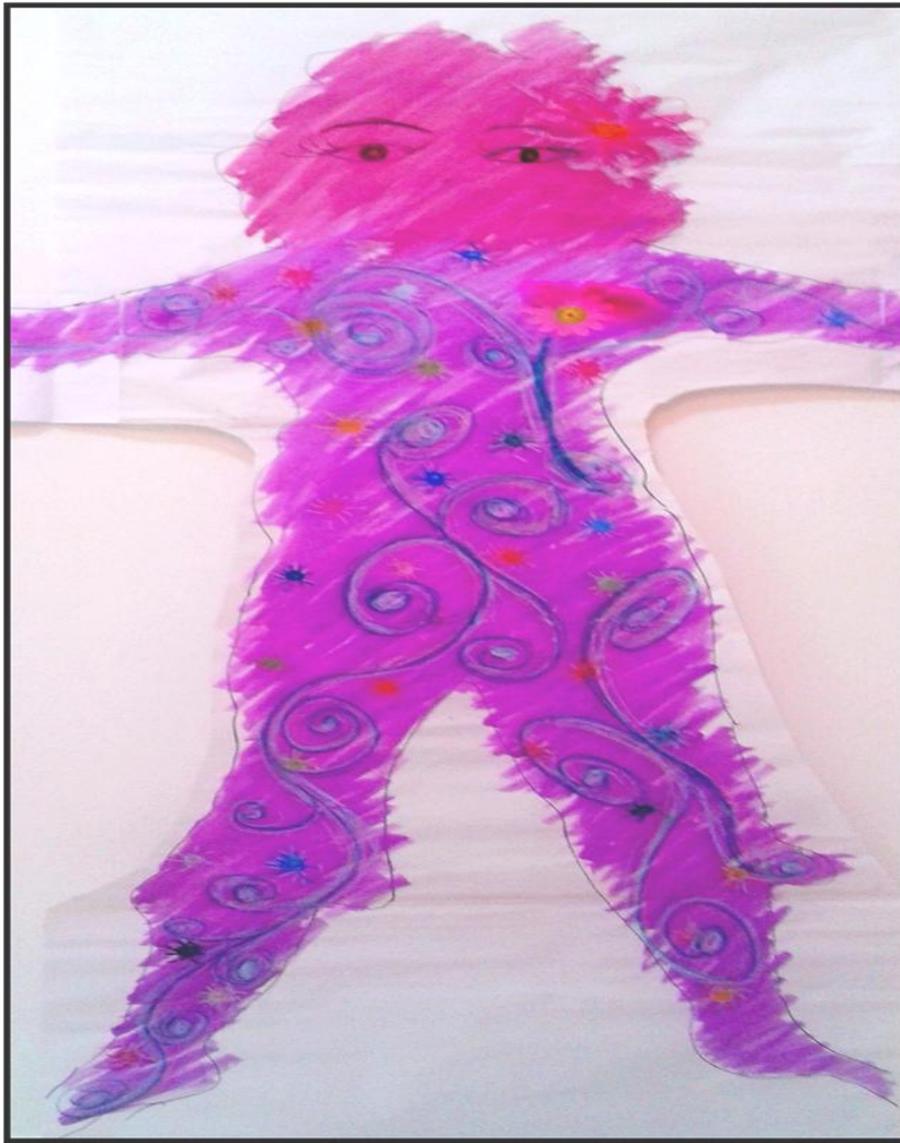


Figure 4.3. Client's life size portrait: The life force.

Description of the Sixth Session

In this session, client was asked to write down her timeline events that were significant to her from age zero to age 39. Although client has been processing the traumatic events for quite a number of years, it seemed the traumatic events were still bothering her. The counselor would like to help her dissolve the traumatic events by using the technique of EMDR (eye movement dissociation and reprocessing).

Client has determined several issues such as her relationship with her father, the inferior feeling during her initial stage of menstruation, fear of failure, awful feeling toward her boss and the betrayal of her ex-boyfriend.

The EMDR technique was applied to desensitize the traumatic images in her mind, her negative thoughts and the body sensation that manifested during therapy. A positive reframing statement was used for each issue so that the mind was able to integrate positive elements in the midst of reprocessing the issue.

Client felt lighter and relieved after each round of reprocessing upon the issue. Her shoulder was the part that was very sensitive, and there was a sore and painful sensation that emerged during therapy. The sensation was gone after the healing took place. In the latest issue with her boyfriend, she has decided to cut off her contact with him completely.

C'lee: When you were doing the therapy, my mind suddenly said, "No more contact with Steve".

C'lor: What does that mean to you?

C'lee: No more relationship with this man. I have been struggling for the past eight months. I am letting go of any expectations; I don't want to see him anymore.

C'lor: When you have made your decision, how do you feel?

C'lee: Relief.

Client has obtained the strength to move on with her life without looking back at any past trauma that has impacted her. The healing white light technique was used to boost the client's decision to move on with her life.

C'lee: I felt the white light beaming on my left shoulder.

C'lor: What is that?

C'lee: Probably it is God. No body sensation but I feel comfortable in my heart. Comfort because I feel I am dwelling with myself. Also, the light on top of my head, feeling secure, to be with myself is comfortable. I also see a purple circle.

C'lor: What is that purple circle to you?

C'lee: My definition is wisdom. I want to say, "dwell with it".

C'lor: Dwell with it?

C'lee: It came out just now.

C'lor: What do you mean by dwell with it?

C'lee: Wisdom. Part of wisdom comes from my intuition. Now my mind is telling me to follow it.

It was obvious that client was being strengthened emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. She has gained the insight of believing her intuition, which she can incorporate with the wisdom, and to use it when dealing with life challenges.

Description of the Seventh Session

In the seventh session, the time line therapy and the resource ratchet techniques were applied to positively pseudo-orientate client for her future endeavor. The client was asked to choose a desired event for the future to replace the event that was diminished from her sight during therapy. For the client, buying a house was the event that filled in the gap on the time line.

C'lee: When you ask me to replace the gap, suddenly I see a train moving in front of me and then a double decker bus. There is the word "welcome".

C'lor: What is the message for you?

C'lee: Moving forward, welcome to the change.

C'lor: How do you feel?

C'lee: Work hard for it. When I am on the boat to move forward, I won't look back at all.

Client felt that her life ought to keep moving forward to the future without looking backward. The scenario of her active imagination for the future has enhanced her confidence to make changes in her life.

In the second part of this session, the resource ratchet technique was actually boosting the participant's inner resources so that she will be confident with herself to achieve her goals in life. During therapy, the resources in the participant's mind were her smiling face, easygoing manner, her sincerity and her networking with friends.

C'lee: When I walk on my time line, I see myself becoming bigger. When I am at the peak, my left hand is shaking. When I press on the anchor point, I actively imagine I am in the state of making money through my networking and friends.

C'lor: How do you feel now?

C'lee: Feeling good, with every step I take, I am becoming bigger. I am smiling and happy.

C'lor: Is that anything you feel increasing?

C'lee: I know well my resources; I ought to be brave enough to use them.

C'lor: That's what you think?

C'lee: Don't keep it, do it!

The client was aware she will go through a transition period while she worked towards her goals in life. She intended to reschedule her time for her social welfare work. She would like to seek a job that will enrich her soul, study counseling courses as well as buying herself a comfortable home. In the meantime, she has decided to take care of herself and get herself ready for the changes.

CASE SUMMARY

Client was aware of the feeling of fear within that was bothering her, the fear of leaving her working environment and also the fear of having an intimate relationship. She would want to change but at the same time she was still standing within her comfort zone. As she was stepping out of her comfort zone, she wanted herself to be grounded. She could recognize the bird as the divine who granted her wisdom, calmness, comfort and happiness.

Client was in the process of finding what she wanted in life. In the midst of searching for her soul, she was also encountering her past hurts. She was very patient with herself, allowing herself to take time to work on her problems. She has shown some inner development since the fourth session. She revealed that she was growing older and wiser. Client has experienced a

significant transformation as she felt the integration of her inner energy and the universal life force took place in the fifth session. She then began to have the courage to make changes in her life.

It was later in the sixth session where she was relieved from the baggage she has been carrying since she was young, and it was dissolved. Some of the questions she had for a long time were finally being answered. The beautiful elements within her came together and she has decided to believe in her intuition as part of her wisdom. She was giving herself time and space to plan out for her future. She has decided some changes that ought to take place within the next five years. She would want to seek a job that could enrich her soul, networking with friends, study counseling courses as well as buying a house. She wanted a life that could fulfill her soul. She has decided to pursue counseling courses as her priority for self-betterment.

DISCUSSION

The client has experienced a significant transformation when she was able to step out of her comfort zone. The fear within was transformed into the helpful energy for making changes. She would like to dwell with her own self. She could feel the connection of her inner energy and the universal life force within that was giving her the message and the courage to enhance her life (Satir, 1988; Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 2006). She described the spiritual experiences as her resources that soothed her and gave her the peace of mind. She has gained the insight for knowing the strength of her intuition was actually giving her wisdom. As she was connected by the power of the universal life force with the self, she felt the confidence and the courage to take a step out in her life to work on the areas of her life that she felt needed change.

The integration of the inner energy and the universal life force was helping the client to recognize the association between her spirituality with the self. She could understand how the self was being restored by her life force through the insights and wisdom she has gained during the counseling process. She would want to make good use of all her resources and integrate them with the universal energy to form a better self. She wishes that the integration of energy will continuously enriching her. Therein, this inner integration process has motivated the client to adopt a holistic and progressive realization of the authentic inner self (Monbourquette, 2001).

The sense of spiritual nature which was embedded within the self of the client was able to be expressed when she possessed the ability to bring the divine within to light. The entire process of development and equilibrium between humanity and spirituality has happened increasingly and thoroughly when the client was connecting her inner energy with the universal life force that enhanced her determination to make changes in her life. As the spiritual self being reinforced, the human self is opened to the cycle of breaking through, inner healing and inner empowerment. The process of self integration will continue until a state of equilibrium is obtained (Kavar, 2012). The "self" of the client is enlightened. Insofar, the client has found her vocation and direction in life (DiLorenzo, 2009). In this case, the client has decided to pursue counseling courses which would nurture her "self" in order to prepare herself for a change of occupation which could fulfill her soul.

On the other hand, the counselor's spirituality was creating the firm foundation to hold and endure the clients' struggles in the course of transformation and self becoming (Carney, 2007). The counselor's spirituality has served as a resource and inspiration in the counseling relationship. As

her spiritual self was connecting with the self of the client, she was indeed making meaning in the use of the internal pathway of the “self” that led to spiritual wisdom and counseling wisdom (Hiles, 2001). The state of creativity of this wisdom was affirmed when the client had finally found her direction in life. The momentum of the spiritual self of both the counselor and the client was moved onto a deeper vibrant state of positive life force (Satir, 1988). The counselor even gained the insight of the equilibrium between the human self and the spiritual self which is relational to wholeness. The interacting relationship of the two dimensions (the spiritual self and the human self) will develop reciprocal impact, interacting and integrating with one another within the context of the client’s life until the entire relationship arrives at its equilibrium. When the whole being of the client is at the state of equilibrium or congruency (Rogers, 1995), the being is in the state of wholeness.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNSELING PRACTICE

The research study has revealed that the counselor was working in process with an individual. The counselor was using her “self” and the higher self as an instrument to foster the counseling relationship. The conviction of the counselor during counseling and therapy was building up the trust and connection between the two persons in the counseling relationship. According to Virginia Satir (1988), the ability of the counselor to connect with the life force, namely the self is essential because it is the dynamic resource for changes in counseling. Counselors who are well prepared to use their own life force will foster a strong atmosphere and dynamic for change in counseling and therapy. The counselors who are attuned to the client’s spiritual needs may facilitate a genuine and fruitful therapy.

This research study has further shown that the counselor was emphasizing the clients’ resources and strengths throughout the journey of self-exploration, self-understanding and self-betterment. The integration of spirituality has moved the client to the level whereby she was able to make meaning in her life in the process of experiencing authentic spiritual. Therefore, the mental health professionals who are keen on doing in-depth counseling and therapy are encouraged to build up their own spiritual, ethical, religious, some human values and strength in order to be well equipped to engage with the client’s spirituality and client’s “self”.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the counselor’s spirituality has created a platform for spiritual experiences in the counseling process and this has further enhanced the momentum of spiritual experiences when the client was able to respond, explore, dwell, immerse and making sense of the phenomena of the spiritual experiences in terms of developing meanings for the “self” to grow into her becoming (Lewis, 2011). The counseling process has indeed served as a bridge for the client to cross over towards her own unique path to the direction of her life goals.

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